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STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

CENTRAL ASIAN STATES DISASTER RESPONSE CONFERENCE 2003

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The world continues to get smaller, and the neighborhoods that it is composed of are becoming more dependent upon one another. Today's threats to stability are trans-national in nature and rarely contained within the borders of one country. In most cases the consequences of a major terrorist action or environmental disaster will quickly overwhelm the management capability and response assets of the affected nation. When that occurs the maintenance of stability relies on effective regional, and if required, international assistance. A government that attempts to "go it alone" in today's environment runs the risk of losing the confidence of its citizens and, as a result, its viability. As part of the United States' active efforts to forge new, productive international relationships to meet the challenges of the 21st century, encouraging stronger regional ties where few currently exist is a key policy initiative.

Establishing Regional Cooperation: The Post-Cold War Challenge

During the Cold War the nations of the world could be placed in one of three baskets: the Free World, led by the United States and its NATO allies; the Communist World, led by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and abetted by China; and the non-aligned nations, personified by India. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 this construct that had served politicians and statesmen so well for 46 years disappeared, leaving behind such groupings as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the resurgent Central and Eastern European nations, and numerous regional competitors attempting to establish their leadership credentials. In their attempt to achieve global recognition, members of this latter group, North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Iran for example, have either achieved a nuclear capability or are seeking to do so. This has posed a distinct challenge to the United States efforts to control proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and has been an impetus to infuse discussions on the management of consequences of WMD use or accidents into the combatant commander's theater security cooperation programs.



Although Russia remained a strong concern in political and foreign policy decisions by CIS members, individual countries have sought out closer ties with the West. In response to these

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expressed desires for closer cooperation, on January 10, 1994 the North Atlantic Council (NAC) invited them to participate in the Partnership for Peace (PfP). Established as the basis for practical security cooperation between NATO and individual Partner countries, PfP activities include defense planning and budgeting, military exercises and civil emergency operations. Today there are 24 PfP members broken out into two groups. The Membership Action Plan (MAP) partners: Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Albania and Macedonia, and the non-MAP partners: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova; the neutrals—Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland; the Caucasus—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan; and Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

In Central Asia the initial responsibility for executing PfP initiatives fell to the US European Command (USEUCOM). In October 2000, combatant command responsibility for the former Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan was shifted to the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) area of responsibility. What USCENTCOM inherited was a country-to-country engagement program that, in addition to the PfP initiatives, included military- to- military training exchanges, and the U.S. National Guard's International Workshops on Emergency Response (IWER) program. These programs effectively identified national military strengths and associated areas for improvement; USCENTCOM supplemented these efforts with programs that stressed common areas for regional cooperation.

Consequence Management And Disaster Response: Regional Cooperation Vehicles

As the focus for their regional collaboration efforts, the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) initiated a series of security cooperation initiatives that focused on environmental security and regional response capabilities for natural and man-made disasters. These topical conferences conducted in 2001 and 2002 at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, proved valuable in identifying major environmental stress points and in establishing working relationships between the USCENTCOM staff and their Central Asian counterparts. Seeking to build upon this spirit of cooperation while addressing issues of immediate concern to the region, the Central Asian States Disaster Response Conference 2003 focused on the management of consequences of terrorist incidents, trafficking of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist and accidental WMD incidents in addition to the natural occurrences.

Hosted by the Government of Kazakhstan, USCENTCOM conducted the Central Asian States Disaster Response Conference 2003 in Almaty, Kazakhstan, September 29 –October 2, 2003. Participants included the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Also in attendance as observers were representatives from the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Turkmenistan was unable to participate. Conference co-sponsors along with USCENTCOM were the Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Installations and Environment [ODUSD (I&E)], and the U. S. Army War College (USAWC) Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL). The Center for Strategic Leadership was the lead agency for agenda development, speaker identification, and the writing, editing, and publishing of the conference report.

The challenge faced by the participants in this third annual conference, was to develop a regional collaborative agenda. Since achieving independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union



Dr. Vitaliy Petrenko, Republic of Uzbekistan, discusses Trans-Border Problems of Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Material Smuggling and Terrorist Threats

regional cooperation has not followed a smooth path. Those regional efforts that do exist are based on the old Soviet regional construct, and are reflected most visibly in parallel national organizational structures. Though a basis for coordination, the effectiveness of these legacy systems to effectively address mutual concerns surrounding the prevention and mitigation of terrorism, trafficking of WMD, and managing the consequences of these and other natural disasters is questionable.

These concerns were addressed directly during the first half of the conference by a series of expert panels. Panelists provided in-depth analysis and detailed recommendations toward preventing and mitigating both man-made and natural disasters threatening the region's infrastructure and ecological balance. Particular attention was paid to the importance of medical surveillance measures as a potential means of identifying and containing the human consequences born of these disasters.

Following the panel presentations workshops were employed to focus participants on three vehicles for increased regional cooperation: medical surveillance; the establishment of a regional cooperative for disaster response; and, the employment of WMD detection capabilities and emergency situation monitoring technologies.

Recognizing the trans-national impact of any regional disaster, the forum arrived at a consensus that an Informal Coordination Committee for Disaster Response should be established. This committee would serve to prioritize regional cooperative efforts in disaster response, ranging from cooperative liaison between State Emergency Management Agencies to countering illicit trafficking of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) materials and narcotics. Participants suggested that this Coordination Committee could lead to other cooperative efforts, including a Medical Surveillance Working Group to explore the practical means to detect infectious diseases and dual-use pathogens within the region, and a Technical Working Group to coordinate regional border security, WMD trafficking, and emergency situation monitoring technologies. Positive signs that the CAS are serious about this effort was the offer by the Kyrgyz Republic to host the first meeting of this coordinating entity within six months, and the national delegation heads' backing for another full-up conference in November 2004.



Mr. Aidaraliev Bolotbek, Kyrgyz Republic discusses country's capabilities for Detection, Prevention, and Response to Terrorist Use of WMD



Colonel Petrov Valeri Vicorovich, Deputy Chairman, Republic of Kazakhstan Agency for Emergency Situations addresses the media

The Future Of Regional Cooperation In Central Asia

The "STANS" of Central Asia are the offspring of political and strategic considerations. They are not ethnic or national entities. All too frequently, therefore, the countries of the region define their relationship with each other not by similarities, but by their differences. Achieving regional cooperation means overcoming these issues, and the centralized nature of their national decision processes. National representatives exhibited a refreshing candor in recognizing that they are all "downstream" from a neighbor's disaster in waiting, and a desire to continue to pursue disaster response and consequence management as a regional cooperation vehicle. To build upon this candor and desire and to meet the expectations of the CAS participants, USCENTCOM and DUSD (I&E) recognize they need to actively pursue the recommendations of the conference, bolster its partnerships in the region to support their implementation, and pursue future incremental steps

to ensure the momentum is maintained within the region. Future conferences should evolve from the “information panels” and idea exchange exhibited in this forum to a “wargame” environment that addresses scenarios of immediate concern to the CAS. Other opportunities to train and exercise across the region should be encouraged, and as appropriate, fiscally supported. The value of the Central Asian States Disaster Response Conference of 2003 will be measured not against its immediate recommendations, but in how effectively those recommendations were pursued to promote future progress toward genuine regional cooperation.

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